

Message Text

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PAGE 01 JIDDA 03420 120943Z
ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EB-07 INR-07 L-03 SS-15 SP-02 /045 W
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FM AMEMBASSY JIDDA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8288

C O N F I D E N T I A L JIDDA 3420

STADIS//////////

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: ETEL, ETRD
SUBJECT: ARAB BOYCOTT: TELECOMMUNICATIONS

REF: A) JIDDA 3087, B) STATE 85456

SUMMARY: PTT MINISTRY IS INTERESTED IN EXPLORING
TELECOMMUNICATIONS EXEMPTION FROM BOYCOTT, BUT SAG
POSITION SO FAR IS UNCLEAR. END SUMMARY

1. PTT DEPUTY MINISTER OBAID TOLD EMBOFF MAY 10 THAT HE
COULD NOT RECALL VISIT BY AMARI (REF B) BUT THAT "MANY
PEOPLE" HAD BEEN IN TOUCH WITH HIM RECENTLY CONCERNING
RCA CASE. HE TOLD US HE HAS BEEN IN CORRESPONDENCE WITH
SAUDI BOYCOTT OFFICE IN MINISTRY OF COMMERCE (NOTE - NOT
CENTRAL BOYCOTT OFFICE IN DAMASCUS) CONCERNING TELECOMMUNICA-
TIONS EXEMPTION AND RCA STATUS, AND BRIEFED US ON LONG
LETTER HE HAD JUST RECEIVED FROM THAT OFFICE (PRESUMABLY
THE LETTER MENTIONED PARA 2 REFTEL A). LETTER, WHICH
DESCRIBES FRAMEWORK OF CURRENT SAG TREATMENT OF RCA,
REVIEWS EARLIER BOYCOTT RULINGS AND CONCLUDES THAT,
BECAUSE OF USG REGULATION OF TELECOMMUNICATIONS
INDUSTRY (AS PER PARA 3C OF REFTEL B), ARAB LEAGUE MEMBERS
CAN BE PERMITTED TO DEAL WITH RCA BUT ON CONDITION THAT
COMMUNICATIONS BE THROUGH INTERMEDIATE POINT, AND NOT
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DIRECTLY TO RCA IN US. LETTER APPARENTLY GOES NOT REFER TO
ANY 1976 ARAB LEAGUE COUNCIL RESOLUTION NOR INDICATE ANY
POSSIBILITY OF CHANGE IN ABOVE SITUATION. OBAID NOTED
THAT THIS WAS CURRENT SAG POLICY FRAMEWORK, AND SAID HE
DOUBTED IF ANY ARAB STATES HAD POINT TO POINT TELE-
COMMUNICATIONS LINKS THROUGH RCA CHANNELS.

2. OBAID SAID QUESTION OF EXEMPTING TELECOMMUNICATIONS FROM BOYCOTT APPLICATION WAS DEFINITELY BEFORE THE ARAB LEAGUE; AND HAD BEEN RAISED INCONCLUSIVELY AT LAST ARAB TELECOMMUNICATIONS UNION MEETING, BUT THAT NO CONCRETE PROPOSAL TO THAT EFFECT HAS BEEN ADVANCED:

3. COMMENT: OBAID IS CLEARLY INCLINED TO BE HELPFUL, AND VOLUNTEERED THAT PTT WOULD LIKE TO SEE INSTITUTION OF DIRECT TELECOMMUNICATIONS LINK FOR RECORD TRAFFIC, CITING SAME TECHNICAL REASONS WE ARGUED EARLIER WITH PTT MINISTER. OBAID AGREED TO KEEP IN TOUCH WITH US.

4. FURTHER COMMENT: NOT RPT NOT TO BE SHARED WITH RCA: OBAID EXPRESSED HIS OPINION - AND ASKED NOT TO BE QUOTED - THAT ONLY ARAB GOVERNMENT WHICH COULD GET RCA CASE THROUGH ARAB LEAGUE WAS SAG. EGYPT, FOR EXAMPLE, COULD PROPOSE EXEMPTION BUT ANY ACTION WOULD REQUIRE SAUDI MUSCLE. HE DISCLOSED THAT HE IS DRAFTING LETTER - CONTENTS UNDISCLOSED - TO CENTRAL BOYCOTT OFFICE BUT THAT IT WILL REQUIRE HIS MINISTER'S CLEARANCE. (OUR OWN BET IS THAT, WHILE SAG IS WAITING FOR US ANTI-BOYCOTT LEGISLATION, OBAID WILL HAVE ODDS AGAINST HIM IF HE IS PROPOSING SAUDI PUSH TO EXEMPT TELECOMMUNICATIONS FROM BOYCOTT.)

5. RECOMMENDATION: THAT RCA, AS WE PROPOSED REFTEL (A), FOLLOW UP ITS EARLIER APPROACH TO OBAID, AND POSSIBLY CONTACT MINISTRY OF COMMERCE BOYCOTT OFFICE (ABDULLAH KHOJA) FOR MORE COMPLETE READOUT OF ITS LETTER QUOTED IN PARA ONE ABOVE. AT MINIMUM, RCA SHOULD CLEAR UP FOR CONFIDENTIAL

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OBAID WHO ITS INTERLOCUTORS ARE IN SAUDI ARABIA. OBAID CLAIMS TO HAVE BEEN VISITED BY THREE SEPARATE SAUDIS IN LAST WEEKS, EACH CLAIMING TO SPEAK FOR COMPANY. PORTER

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